

SEFER DANIEL
By Rav Yaakov Medan

Shiur #17: Chapter 11a
In the Lions' Den

1. Antisemitism

And Darius the Mede received the kingship; he was about sixty-two years old. It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, who would be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three viceroys, of whom Daniel was one, so that these satraps might report to them, and the king would have no damage. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the viceroys and the satraps, because of his superlative spirit; and the king proposed to set him over the entire kingdom. Then the viceroys and the satraps sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no occasion nor fault, for he was faithful, and there was no error or fault to be found in him. Then said these men: "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel unless we find it against him in the law of his God." (6:1-6)[1]

Daniel's appointment to the top echelons of power obviously resulted, among other things, from the publicizing of the incident involving the writing on the wall, as well as his wisdom and his loyalty, as proven in the days of Nevukhadnetzar as well as at the beginning of the Median reign. His ascent is now obstructed by the jealousy which the other ministers feel towards him.

Why were these ministers jealous of him? Was this simply a matter of routine court politics, with functionaries naturally disposed to trying to bring down whoever is more senior than themselves, with a view to being promoted to replace them? It would seem that there is room to draw a parallel between the attitude of the satraps towards Daniel and the views held by Haman, just a few years later, during the kingdom of Persia and Media:

Haman said to King Achashverosh: "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from those of every other people, nor do they observe the king's laws; therefore it is of no profit to the king to suffer them." (*Esther* 3:8)

Up until this point, pure anti-Semitism is practically unknown in *Tanakh*. The war against Babylon had a clearly nationalistic background. The Babylonians had nothing against Jewish faith in God and His Torah; they seem to have had no problem with Jews being Jewish. The Kingdom of Yehuda was destroyed as part of a broader, regional conflict – specifically, between the Babylonian Nevukhadnetzar and the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Kingdom of Yehuda, under King Tzidkiyahu, chose to cooperate

with Pharaoh and his allies and to turn its back on its covenant with Nevukhadnetzar – and that is what led to its fall.

Further on, we will discuss at length the conflict that arose later between the kingdoms of Macedonia and Greece and the Jewish People – a conflict that was clearly religious in character and which also entailed draconian decrees against Torah and the observance of its commandments.

Sandwiched in between the kingdom of Babylon and the Greek empire, we encounter hostility of a different sort: hatred of Israel for its own sake. This hatred did not arise for any nationalist reasons – for *Am Yisrael*, during the first (and only^[2]) year of the reign of Darius the Mede, represented no national danger to anyone or any nation. Similarly, we find no animosity towards the Jewish religion on the part of the Persian Empire.

It is difficult to define the reason for pure hatred of Jews. Historians have invested great efforts in trying to understand modern anti-Semitism. We may posit that a nation which views itself – and rightly so – as the eternal nation, surviving and persisting where all others have arisen and eventually declined, represents a threat to other nations, giving rise to potent hatred. In any event, under each different world power, *Am Yisrael* is forced to address a different challenge. Daniel was persecuted by the royal ministers apparently simply because he was Jewish. The prohibition of prayer was just an excuse, as the text itself makes clear.

Why was it specifically in the kingdom of Persia and Mede that hatred of Jews developed? Perhaps the answer has more to do with time than with place. *Am Yisrael* was the first nation to be exiled and still retain its national spirit. Its people, such as Daniel and his companions, were shown to be courageous and talented. This was a threatening phenomenon, and perhaps it is this that gave rise to hatred. Indeed, it is during the Second Temple Period that we find this sort of anti-Semitism manifest elsewhere, as well, especially in Egypt. Josephus, in his *Against Apion* and in his autobiography, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, engages in polemics with writers of his times and of previous generations who hated Jews. The Egyptian historian Manetho had created a history of the Jewish People from the time of the Exodus, presenting a clearly anti-Semitic perspective, and Josephus countered his claims as well. It seems that this was also one of the aims of his great oeuvre, *Antiquities of the Jews*.^[3] In this book, Josephus aspired to provide the Hellenist Roman reader with an organized picture of Jewish history and to supply firm proof for each of the historical assertions about the nation, thereby disproving the claims of those who hated them.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1] See Z. Yaavetz, *Toledot Yisrael III* (Vilna, 5658), "*Motza ha-Davar*," pp. 32-33. He proposes the surprising conclusion (which we reject categorically) that the Daniel who appears in this chapter was one of the grandsons of the Daniel at the beginning of the Book. He asserts that it could not have been the same person, considering the great chronological gap separating Darius the Mede from Nevukhadnetzar and Yehoyakim, the period of Daniel's exile. He identifies Darius the Mede in our chapter as the king referred to by historiographers as Darius II (Nothos). According to the accepted academic chronology, to which Yaavetz adheres, this king reigned from 423-404 B.C.E. Daniel was exiled in the days of Yehoyakim, in the year 605 B.C.E. (according to Yaavetz's calculation), or in the year 597 B.C.E. (according to Rashi's reckoning, which we have followed thus far). Yaavetz proves his assertion from the vision recorded later on in 11:2. His approach reflects the obscurity surrounding the chronology of this period. Those who accept the conventional academic account of the kings and their reigns and want to relate to the text in *Sefer Daniel* in a straightforward, literal way must identify Darius the Mede as the king who reigned before Cyrus, in 539 B.C.E. This conforms with what we are told about Daniel, who was exiled as a young boy in the days of Yehoyakim and stood before Darius 62 years later. Anyone seeking to identify Darius the Mede with Darius Nothos is forced to change this chronology and adopt the record presented by *Chazal* – as C. Chefetz does in his article, "*Malkhut Paras u-Madai bi-Tekufat Bayit Sheni u-Lefaneha – Iyyun mei-Chadash*," *Megadim 4* (5751), pp. 78-147. Yaavetz creates an untenable chronological hybrid, and on this basis he explains the book of *Daniel* as recording the events concerning two different "Daniels" from the same family.

[2] This accords both with the record of the *Seder Olam* and with academic research. See *Seder Olam*, chapter 28; Y.M. Grintz, *Mechkarim ba-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 5739), p. 266.

[3] This work was intended mainly as a commemoration of the Jewish nation, which was gradually being eradicated under the yoke of the Roman Empire. Through the book, Josephus sought to convey to the world the Jewish heritage and to present the contribution of the Jewish nation to the development of mankind. From the perspective of this world-view, there is a similarity between the two comrade-adversaries – Elazar ben Yair, atop the walls of Masada, and Josephus, in the camp of the Roman army down below, laying siege to the Jews. Both were leaders of the Great Revolt up until Josephus's defection. At the sight of the well-oiled, efficient Roman war machine, both appear to have arrived at the conclusion that the Jewish nation had reached the end of its path. They were divided as to what this meant in terms of choosing a course of action. Josephus joined the stronger side which, it appeared to him, would be leading the world from this point onwards. He remained a Jew in his faith and in his private conduct, but cut off from the Jewish nation which, to his view, was about to be annihilated. Elazar concluded that the end should be met with courage and dignity, rather than with submission to the oppressor who was squeezing the life out of the Jewish nation. Both figures, in a certain sense, stood in contrast to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, who understood that Jewish independence, Jerusalem, and the Temple were lost, but believed in the continuation of Jewish existence around the Torah and the land. He asked for "Yavneh and its Sages" in order to continue with them until the Temple could be rebuilt. See *Rosh ha-Shana* 30a; *Sukka* 41a; *Beitza* 5b; *Menachot* 68b.